

the provisions of the International Religious Freedom Act. The future of religious liberty overseas depends on our willingness to strengthen it here in Congress.

Lastly, if we are committed to protecting religious liberty abroad, we must be ready to defend it here at home.

At the beginning of my remarks, I recalled the imagery of John Winthrop's "City on a Hill." Throughout our Nation's history, several public figures have invoked Winthrop's allusion to capture a simple truth: America's special freedoms make her a light to other nations.

Through our robust exercise of religious liberty, we offer hope to people beyond our borders—men and women suffering under the yoke of oppression who look to our country for sanctuary. As our nation strives to be an example of religious freedom, we can offer greater hope to those persecuted for their religious beliefs, and by addressing threats to freedom of conscience here at home—including the attacks on religious liberty that I detailed in previous remarks—we can strengthen and beautify our City on a Hill, building upon the foundation laid for us by our Pilgrim forbears, so that the light of our Nation might shine before all mankind.

With this call to action, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate in morning business for such time as I may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 2303

Mr. MCCAIN. Madam President, over the last month, in a series of terrorist attacks around the globe that have killed hundreds of people, ISIL has commenced a new phase in its war on the civilized world. We have seen attacks in Ankara, Beirut, and Baghdad, the bombing of a Russian airliner over Egypt, and, of course, the horrific scenes last Friday in Paris, where ISIL gunmen wearing suicide belts attacked innocent civilians at restaurants, bars, a soccer stadium, and a concert hall, killing, as we know, 129 people and wounding 352 others.

This evolution in ISIL operations further highlights the threat that they pose to countries beyond the Middle East, including the United States of America. We cannot and should not wait for ISIL to attack the United States before we finally, finally, finally acknowledge that we are a nation at war and that we must adopt a new strategy to destroy ISIL.

What we must also acknowledge is that while the threat posed by ISIL and our other adversaries is growing,

our national security budgets are increasingly disconnected from our national security requirements. Regardless of what ISIL will do next or how the United States will decide to act, our national security budgets through fiscal year 2021 have been arbitrarily—I emphasize "arbitrarily"—capped by the Budget Control Act.

To be sure, the recently passed Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 provides important relief from the sequester-level budget caps for fiscal year 2016 and 2017, and I am grateful to the Republican majority leader for leading that effort. Our national defense would be in far worse shape without that legislation. At the same time, that agreement is less optimal for next year and obviously does not seek to address the budget caps that continue for the next 4 years. Indeed, under the revised Budget Control Act, in constant dollars, we are actually on track to spend less on defense next year than this year. It has not taken long for world events, yet again, to show the inadequacy of this exercise. At roughly the same time we were locking in next year's defense budget caps, ISIL began demonstrating its capability to strike targets outside of Iraq and Syria and now at the very center of the western world.

Indeed, since the Budget Control Act of 2011 capped defense and other discretionary spending for the subsequent 10 years, absent any consideration of changing global threats or national requirements, let's consider what has transpired since 2011. Any semblance of order in the Middle East has collapsed. We are all tragically familiar with the carnage in Syria and Iraq, but Libya has also deteriorated into anarchy and safe havens for ISIL and its affiliates. Yemen has become the scene of a proxy war between Iran and the gulf Arab nations. General David Petraeus testified to the Armed Services Committee: "Almost every Middle Eastern country is now a battleground or a combatant in one or more wars."

From the outset, the Obama administration's policy was to withdraw from the Middle East. The President pulled all U.S. troops out of Iraq and put us on the path to do the same in Afghanistan, but as we expected, and as I predicted, evil forces have moved in to fill the vacuums that we have left behind. ISIL has captured large swaths of territories in Syria and Iraq and has spread across the region to Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt, and other countries.

As a result, we now have thousands of troops back in Iraq. The U.S. military has conducted over 6,000 airstrikes in Syria and Iraq to combat ISIL. We are increasing counterterrorism operations in North Africa and providing military assistance to Saudi Arabia and our gulf partners fighting in Yemen. The situation in Afghanistan has driven the President to further delay the drawdown of U.S. troops. The effectiveness of these policies is questionable, but their cost is not.

In Europe, we have seen Russian forces invade Crimea and intervene militarily in Ukraine. This is the first time since World War II that one government has invaded and sought to annex the territory of another sovereign territory in Europe. Since then, Vladimir Putin has grown bolder. He continues to modernize Russia's military. And most recently, of course, he has deployed Russian forces into Syria to prop up the Assad regime, even firing cruise missiles into the region from outside of it, as far away as nearly 1,000 miles.

Russia's actions have now forced the administration to bring back to Europe on a rotational basis one of the two brigade combat teams that it withdrew. As Russia continues its aggression in Europe and increases its involvement in the Middle East, the Secretary of Defense acknowledges that we need an entirely new strategy to counter Russia. All of this requires proper funding—all of it. All of it requires proper funding levels, but our defense agencies have not gotten that, even as they have been asked to do more to counter Russia.

The situation isn't limited to Russia and Europe. China is growing more assertive as well. It has built several land features in the South China Sea, equipped with military buildings, fort facilities, and even runways, all in an effort to expand Chinese territorial claims in the area. In addition to harassing other regional states, five Chinese navy ships were spotted in the Bering Sea off of Alaska during President Obama's recent trip to Alaska. Meanwhile, hackers in China continue to conduct cyber espionage and cyber attacks against our government and critical sectors of our economy. Russia, Iran, and North Korea are doing so as well, all in the past year.

Again and again, national security requirements have materialized after the Budget Control Act was passed, but we forced our military to tackle a growing set of missions with arbitrary and insufficient budget levels, revised periodically with whatever additional resources the Congress is able to scare up. The results speak for themselves. Since 2011, as worldwide threats have been increasing, we have cut our defense spending by almost 25 percent in annual spending. Not only has annual spending decreased, but so have the long-term budget plans of the Department of Defense. Each year the Department releases a 5-year budget. However, each year it has reduced its 5-year plan in an effort to closer align its spending to the Budget Control Act. As a result, while the short-term effects of these arbitrary budget caps are bad enough, the long-term harm they are doing is arguably worse. Our military is raiding its own future readiness, modernization, and research and development spending to pay its present bills and meet present needs. We are not making the kinds of investments in

our future warfighting capability to remain technologically superior to adversaries that are closing the gap with us.

What is even more troubling is that even as we made these reductions, our national security and defense strategies have stayed essentially the same. Day-to-day requirements for the military have not been reduced to match declining budgets. Independent analysis by defense experts at places such as the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and the RAND Corporation have all pointed out that current budget levels and even the President's budget are insufficient to pay for our national security strategy given the current threat environment.

All of this applies equally to our other national security agencies beyond the Department of Defense. Protecting our Nation is not just the job of the U.S. military; it also depends on a strong and properly resourced intelligence community, Federal law enforcement, and homeland security agencies, and a diplomatic presence overseas that can project American leadership and resolve problems before they become threats to our people and our interests. Yet these other national security agencies have been dealing with the same fiscal challenges under the same worsening threat environment and with the same effects as our military. Not just our military, but the NSA, the CIA, the State Department, FBI—all of these agencies are unable to function effectively because of the effects of these budget cuts.

To continue on this way, especially after Paris, is not only absurd, it is dangerous. If we are serious about national security, if we are serious about meeting our highest constitutional responsibility of providing for the common defense, and if we are serious about heeding the frequent and urgent warnings of our Nation's most respected national security and foreign policy leaders, then we must change course immediately. We cannot continue to prioritize deficit reduction over national defense, allowing arbitrary budget caps to determine our national security needs.

This process ought to be simple. We must identify what we need to be safe, define those requirements clearly, and provide budgets to resource them. The two can't be disconnected. If we choose not to fight ISIL or deter Russian aggression in Europe or uphold freedom of the seas in Asia, then we can justify the cuts to the budget. But neither the Congress nor the administration wants to do that, nor should we. The only responsible thing to do, then, is to spend the money that is necessary to meet the national security requirements we have set for ourselves. And with the threats to our homeland growing closer, we can't afford to delay any longer.

That is why I have introduced commonsense legislation that is long overdue. Its goal is simple: to exempt national security spending from seques-

tration under the Budget Control Act. This exemption would not just apply to the Department of Defense; it would also include the security-related functions of our intelligence agencies, the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department, and the National Nuclear Security Administration. By doing so, we will enable the President and Congress to build national security budgets based on national security requirements instead of arbitrary caps that entail greater risk to our Nation.

I know that some will express concern about the impact of this legislation on national deficits and the debt. I will match my record as a fiscal conservative with anybody's. I have spent decades targeting wasteful government spending, and I believe we must tackle our debt problem before it overwhelms generations. But we cannot afford to put the lives of our men and women in uniform as well as those of our citizens at greater risk, which everyone—all of our senior military leaders—has said we are doing. By holding to these budget caps, we are putting the lives of the men and women serving in the military today at greater risk. Don't we have an obligation to these young men and women who are serving in the military in uniform? Just because of arbitrary caps, are we going to put their lives in greater danger? Of course the world has become more dangerous. Of course there have been tremendous upheavals. And we are asking them to do the job with less than they need in order to do it most effectively and at the very risk of their own lives. This is disgraceful. This is disgraceful, that we should neglect the view of every national security expert and every one of our uniformed leaders. They have all said the same thing in testimony before the Armed Services Committee.

I have asked them: Does sequestration and the effects of sequestration put the lives of our young men and women in uniform at greater risk?

Answer: Yes.

History does not repeat itself, but I do remember in the 1970s when we slashed defense spending and the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army came over and said we had a hollow Army. We are now not approaching the hollow Army, but we certainly are approaching a point where we are unable to meet the new challenges that I just articulated in these comments, and we are putting the lives of the men and women in the military in greater danger. That is not what we are supposed to be all about.

We can't persist with the illusion that we will somehow balance the Federal budget and meaningfully cut the debt on the back of discretionary spending alone. Our defense and national security budgets are not the root of our spending problem. The real problem is rising entitlement costs and mandatory spending.

A Heritage Foundation report found that 85 percent of projected growth and spending is due to entitlement programs and interest on the debt. Reduc-

ing our debt will only be possible with real entitlement reform. Cuts to discretionary spending will not have a major long-term impact, but for years we have gone to that well because it is politically easier than reforming entitlement programs.

So the major sources of the debt are three: Medicare, Social Security, and interest on the debt. That is the problem we face. So we enacted arbitrary cuts on our Nation's national security capabilities in somehow trying to convince people that therefore we will reduce the debt. That is a lie. We don't have the guts to stand up here and do the right thing, which is entitlement reform. Instead, we continue on this mindless sequestration—mindless because it is a meat ax.

I am happy to say that we have identified \$11 billion in this National Defense Authorization Act. As chairman of the committee, I have worked with Members on both sides of the aisle. We have identified \$11 billion in savings and lots more to come. We can trim from the defense budget a lot of the waste and inefficiencies that are there, but to do it with a meat ax is the wrong way to do it. I encourage other committees to use their authorization processes to reform government and eliminate wasteful spending. However, to purposefully shortchange our national security agencies is obviously penny-wise and pound-foolish.

Just last week, all of us went home and celebrated Veterans Day. There is probably not an event that is quite like it in all of the things we do in this Nation. To spend time with our veterans and to see our Nation honor them is a remarkable experience and incredibly uplifting. It seems to me that year after year, there are more and more Americans who are applauding and appreciating the service and sacrifice of our veterans. We are reminded that what makes America great is the men and women who serve it, and those who have served we honor. These volunteers sacrifice their personal comfort, their families, and sometimes their lives for this country. They always put the mission first, and it is time we do the same. We must fully resource national security so that those who work to keep us safe day in and day out have what they need to accomplish what we have asked of them. If their mission is worth the ultimate sacrifice, what other policy agenda could be more important?

These young men and women are putting their lives on the line as we speak, and what are we doing? We are mindlessly cutting defense and their ability to defend this Nation and themselves. It is a shameful chapter. It is a shameful chapter and an abrogation of our responsibilities to these men and women.

So the next time Members are home in their home States and they meet these men and women in uniform and they support the sequestration, look the other way because they are not taking care of those men and women who are willing to sacrifice.

I am sorry if my words sound harsh, but in this world we are in today, to continue this mindless sequestration is an abrogation of our responsibility as their elected leaders.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Budget be discharged from further consideration of S. 2303 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; I further ask consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

What this is, for the benefit of my colleagues, is the elimination of sequestration for not only defense but all of our national security requirements and agencies of government that are suffering under this mindless sequestration.

I see my colleague from Rhode Island is going to object. All I can say to my colleague from Rhode Island is I am deeply, deeply, deeply disappointed in his objecting to doing the right thing for the men and women who are serving in the military.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REED. Madam President, reserving my right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. I think Chairman MCCAIN is headed in exactly the right direction, which is trying to eliminate sequestration. The real answer is to repeal the Budget Control Act because the scope of relief offered by the chairman is certainly broader than just the Department of Defense, but it doesn't include all the agencies that actually protect us and interfere with our opponents. For example, the Department of Treasury, in terms of trying to suppress terrorist financing, would be subject to sequestration in this legislation; the CDC would be subject to sequestration, even if there were a biological attack—and unfortunately our opponents, particularly terrorists, have talked about such an attack.

It is not really the issue of sequestration; it is limiting the scope of relief. I think we should, as my colleague suggests, stand up and say we can repeal the BCA. Then we can talk about budgeting according to the demands, according to our total national security picture.

Longer term, national security in this country is certainly bolstered immediately by the Department of Defense, Department of Treasury, State Department, et cetera; but without education, without many other efforts in our government, we will not be able to truly defend the Nation. So for that reason, Mr. President, I with great reluctance object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Objection is heard.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Peter William Bodde, of Maryland, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Libya; Elisabeth I. Millard, of Virginia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Tajikistan; Marc Jonathan Sievers, of Maryland, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Sultanate of Oman; Deborah R. Malac, of Virginia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Uganda; Lisa J. Peterson, of Virginia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of Swaziland; and H. Dean Pittman, of the District of Columbia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Mozambique.

VOTE ON BODDE NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bodde nomination?

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), and the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. VITTER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 95, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 309 Ex.]

YEAS—95

Alexander	Feinstein	Murkowski
Ayotte	Fischer	Murphy
Baldwin	Flake	Murray
Barrasso	Franken	Paul
Bennet	Gardner	Perdue
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Peters
Blunt	Grassley	Portman
Booker	Hatch	Reed
Boozman	Heinrich	Reid
Boxer	Heitkamp	Risch
Brown	Heller	Roberts
Burr	Hirono	Rounds
Cantwell	Hoeben	Sasse
Capito	Inhofe	Schatz
Cardin	Isakson	Schumer
Carper	Johnson	Scott
Casey	Kaine	Sessions
Cassidy	King	Shaheen
Coats	Kirk	Shelby
Cochran	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Collins	Lankford	Sullivan
Coons	Leahy	Tester
Corker	Lee	Thune
Cornyn	Manchin	Tillis
Cotton	Markey	Toomey
Crapo	McCain	Udall
Cruz	McCaskill	Warner
Daines	McConnell	Warren
Donnelly	Menendez	Whitehouse
Durbin	Merkley	Wicker
Enzi	Mikulski	Wyden
Ernst	Moran	

NOT VOTING—5

Graham	Rubio	Vitter
Nelson	Sanders	

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON MILLARD NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Millard nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON SIEVERS NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Sievers nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON MALAC NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Malac nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON PETERSON NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Peterson nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

VOTE ON PITTMAN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Pittman nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

The Senator from Mississippi.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with